

STOUT
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

WISCONSIN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

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August 10, 2009

Senator Kathleen Vinehoot
Room 104 South, State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Vinehoot:

I would like to voice my support for Senate Bill 223, which is intended to ensure that each geographical area of Wisconsin is represented on the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents.

For as long as anyone can remember, the Chippewa Valley region of Wisconsin has been lacking in representation on the Regents, even though the region is home to two fine institutions: UW-Stout in Menomonie and UW-Eau Claire. We have had student representatives, but haven't had the continuity that comes with non-student members.

We have worked extremely hard to overcome this lack of representation by maintaining close contact with various members of the board, and have largely been successful in this effort. But nothing can compare to having a citizen member Regent from this area who understands the particular needs and concerns of the universities here, as well as the overall needs of the area.

Furthermore, having a citizen member Regent from this area would broaden the perspective on the entire board. These Regents would come from all over Wisconsin, which would add diversity to the views expressed by board members.

For these reasons and others, I ask that the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education votes favorably on Senate Bill 223 and sends it to the full Senate for consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Sorensen
Chancellor





JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 223
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education
Tuesday, August 11th
10 am
201 Southeast

Chairwoman Vinehout and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on Senate Bill 223, which will bring much-needed regional representation to the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. The bill directs that, beginning in 2015, at least one member of the Board of Regents reside in each of seven geographical regions throughout the state. These regions have been drawn so that each contains a balance of UW two and four-year campuses. It will ensure that this body, which is responsible for governing the entire UW system and naming its chancellors and deans, will have at least one member that will be responsible for representing the needs and interests of each of its campuses.

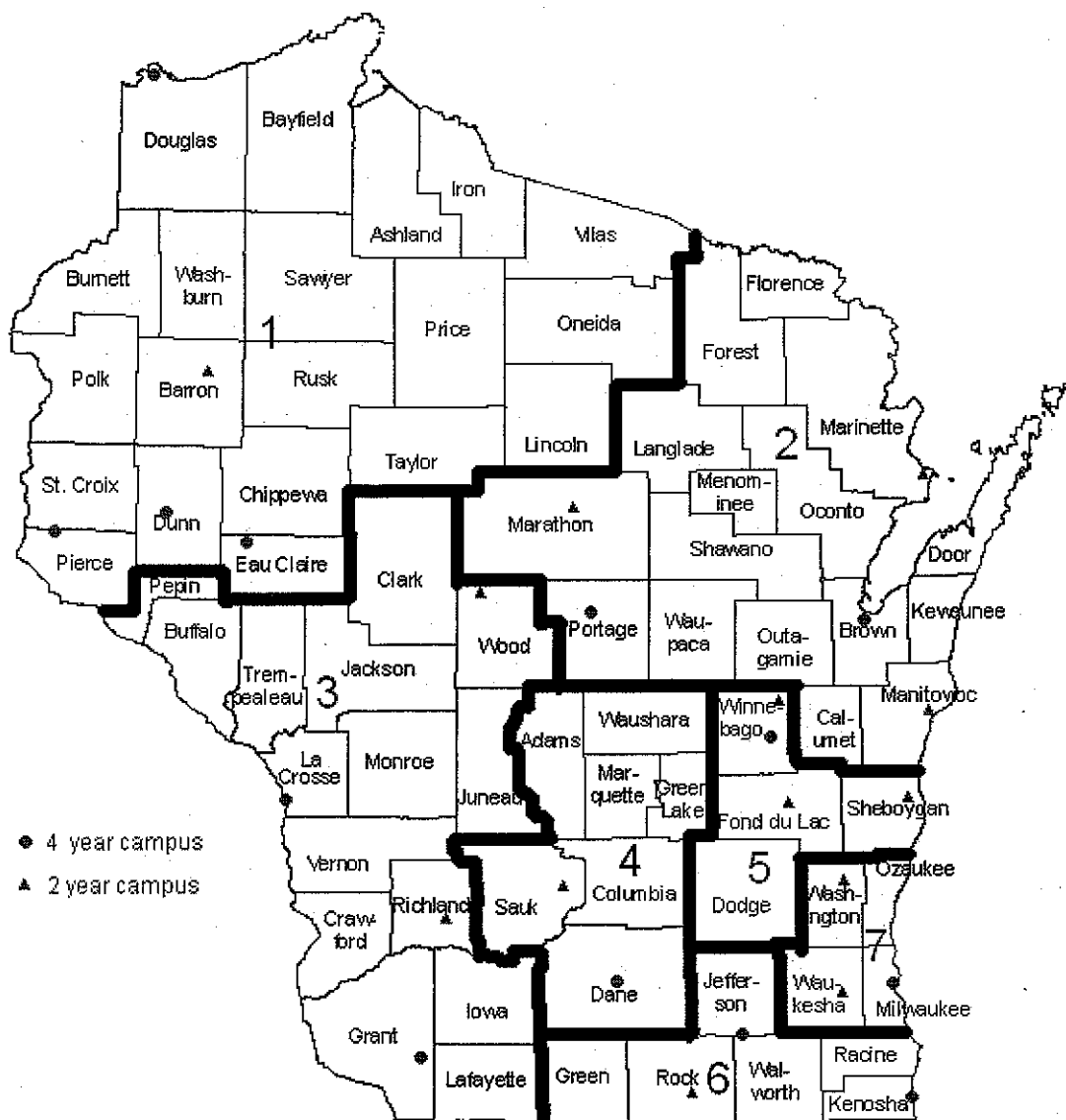
The current makeup of the Board of Regents illustrates the need for this provision. Of the 14 current appointed citizen regents, ten—over 70 percent—reside in either Dane or Milwaukee County. No appointed regent currently resides near either Parkside or Whitewater, and the northwest quadrant of the state, home to four four-year campuses—Superior, Eau Claire, Stout and River Falls—does not have a single representative on the Board of Regents living anywhere within it.

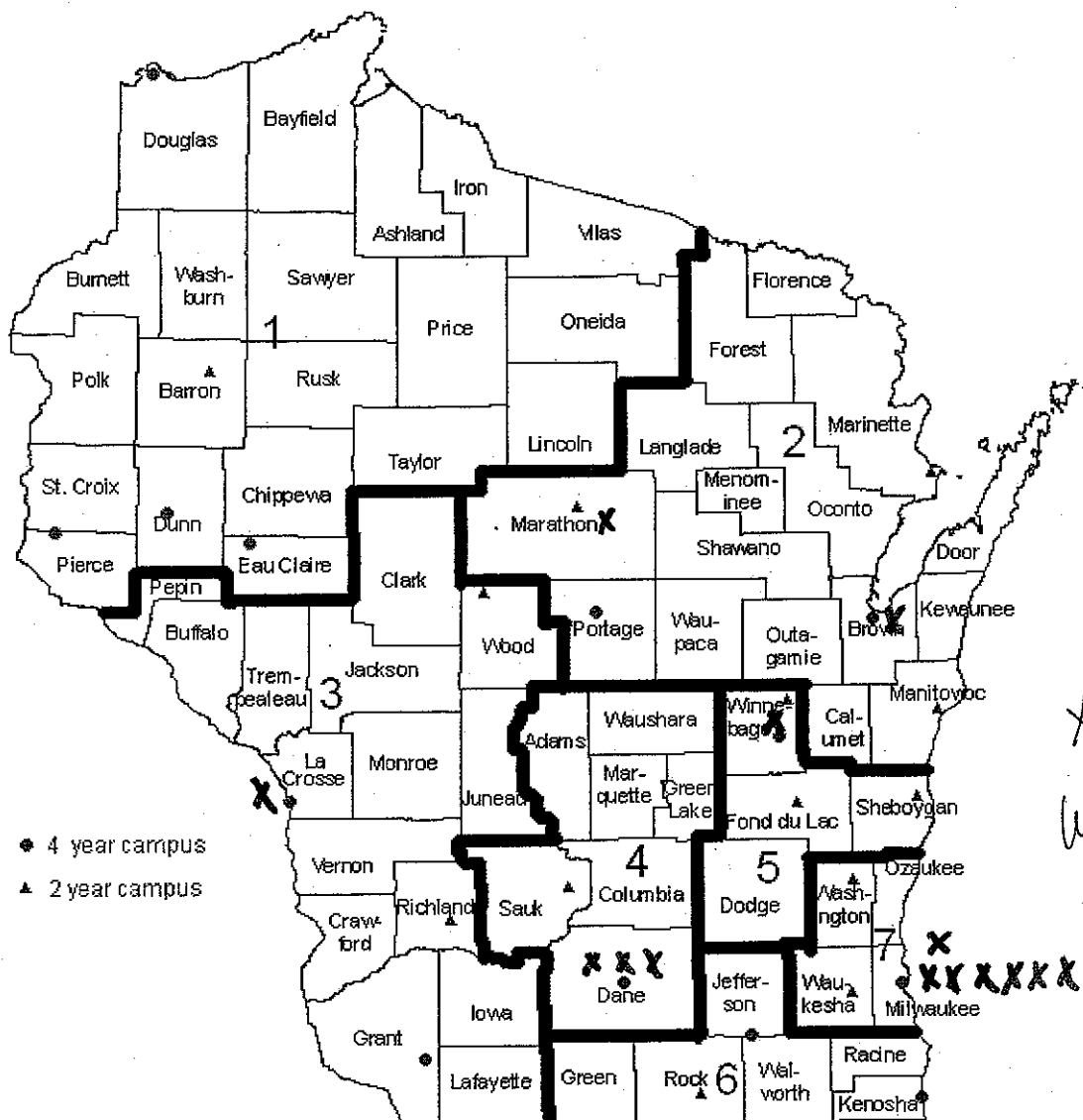
I understand that, given the size and importance of UW Madison and UW Milwaukee, the critical mass of the system will always center on these campuses. But one of the best features of the UW System, and the one that makes it such a cornerstone of the culture and economy of the state, is that we have fine four and two-year campuses throughout the state. The dispersion of these campuses permits the university to extend access to citizens in every geographical area of Wisconsin. Traditional students don't need to move far from home in order to receive a college education, and non-traditional students, including the many displaced workers who rely on the university to train them for new careers, can pursue higher education without disrupting their lives. This dispersion has also fostered a system in which each campus has developed its own specializations, its own personality, and its own unique relationship with the social and economic makeup of its community.

And, as we discuss the topic of brain drain, it is important to point out that students who graduate from the comprehensive campuses around the state are often much more likely to remain in Wisconsin – a testimony to the importance of place in the mission of the university system.

In short, the fact that the UW System reaches out to every corner of the state is one of the key characteristics that makes it a great university system. Since that geographical reach is so important to the system, it should be reflected in the makeup of the body that governs that system. This bill will ensure that each campus and every region of the state can look to at least one member of the board and know that that individual is charged with representing its interests on the Board of Regents.

Those of us who represent the various parts of the state that include UW System campuses other than Madison and Milwaukee have been concerned for years about the imbalance that exists in the allocation of state resources throughout the system. This bill will help bring balance to the Board of Regents, which will in turn assist that body in balancing the needs of the entire system. Madison and Milwaukee are important to the economic health and future of this state, but the four- and two- year campuses that comprise the lion's share of the UW System are no less important. This legislation recognizes the tremendous impact an equally strong and unified system can have on the entire state's economy, and on the culture of its communities. I hope you will give it your support.





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Updated: 7/6/2009

Editorial: UW System covers state; regents should too

One of Wisconsin's greatest strengths is its robust university system, which includes 13 four-year campuses spread across the state, from Superior in the north to Milwaukee in the south; from the flagship institution in Madison to west-central Wisconsin's own UW-Eau Claire, UW-Stout and UW-River Falls.

The UW System's geographical reach - it also includes 13 two-year campuses and the statewide UW Extension - ensures residents and communities across the state are never far from the educational, research and economic benefits of higher learning.

Unfortunately, the Board of Regents, the system's governing body, lacks the same geographic scope. Large areas of the state have no direct representation when system policy is set.

And that's why the Legislature should give strong consideration to a bill that would ensure geographic diversity on the Board of Regents.

State Rep. Jeff Smith, D-Eau Claire, is lead author of Assembly Bill 276, which will receive a hearing by the Assembly's higher education committee Wednesday in the state Capitol.

"There's always at least the perception that we're not being represented (on the board)," Smith said, referring to western Wisconsin. "Why not? We have some great universities here."

The bill would create seven geographical districts and mandate that at least one of the board's 14 citizen members comes from each district.

Currently, half of the board's 14 citizen members are from Milwaukee County, and another three are from Dane County. Of the remaining four, two are from Green Bay, one is from Wausau and the other is from Neenah.

Western Wisconsin is not completely without representation. By law, the president of the Wisconsin Technical College Board is a regent; currently, that is Brent Smith of La Crosse. In addition, UW-Eau Claire student Aaron Wingad was named one of two student regents last month.

Nonetheless, the Board of Regents' makeup is skewed toward the populous - and politically influential - southern Wisconsin corridor of Madison and Milwaukee. That's understandable for several reasons. For one, Madison and Milwaukee are home to the system's largest universities, and they deserve representation. Secondly, the regents are political appointees selected by Gov. Jim Doyle.

However, despite their size and importance, Madison and Milwaukee are overrepresented.

"We feel ignored," Smith said. "I'm sure the Board of Regents is fair and makes wise decisions along the way, but it doesn't make us feel any better when most of the appointees come from the Dane County and Milwaukee County area."

Similar efforts have been attempted before: When Republicans controlled the Assembly, state Rep. Kitty Rhoades, R-Hudson, sponsored a bill requiring representation based on congressional districts. Rhoades is a sponsor of the new bill, as are several other area

lawmakers, including Rep. Chris Danou, D-Trempealeau; Rep. John Murtha, R-Baldwin; Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls; Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, D-Alma; and Sen. Pat Kreitlow, D-Chippewa Falls.

Such bipartisan support bodes well for a bill that would ensure higher education decisions are made with the whole state in mind.

- Tom Giffey, editorial page editor